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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001391

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SUBJECT: KOREAN TROOP DEPARTURE: AFGHANS WANT HELP
REVERSING ROK DECISION

Classified By: DCM Richard Norland for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is requesting U.S. assistance in reversing the decision made late last year by the South Korean Parliament to not extend ROK troops in Afghanistan beyond December 31, 2007. Post leaves it up to Washington and Seoul to evaluate whether this is possible but reaffirms the positive contributions South Korea is making in Afghanistan and could continue to make in the future, especially if Korean interest in sharing a PRT were to materialize. END SUMMARY

MFA Seeks Reversal of Korean Parliament Decision

12. (C) Foreign Minister Spanta's Senior Policy Advisor, Davood Moradian, told Deputy Political Counselor April 17 that the MFA was deeply concerned about the Korean decision to withdraw its troops, primarily due to its possible spillover effects which could prompt other countries to do the same. The GOA fears the move could lead to "disruptive activities" and send a signal to the insurgents that the international community was not committed to Afghanistan. (Note: Post understands from the ROK Embassy in Kabul that the Korean troops were extended until December 31, 2007 on condition that they be withdrawn by the end of the year. ROK Embassy contact indicates the current mood in Seoul is for the ROKG to honor this agreement with the Korean Parliament but that a debate on whether to extend for another year will likely take place in the fall. End Note)

13. (C) The MFA believes that reversing the ROK Parliament's decision should be the shared responsibility of Afghanistan, the U.S., and the ROK. Moradian wants to push a two-pronged approach. First, the ROK Parliament needs to be convinced that Iraq and Afghanistan should not be linked, as it apparently is in the Korean legislation. Key Korean Parliamentarians need to be encouraged to change their perceptions, Moradian said. Second, the MFA would like to see a mechanism develop that would allow Korea to be part of

a joint PRT in one of the more secure parts of the country. Moradian thinks this would provide the opportunity for Korea to "adopt" a part of Afghanistan as other PRTs have done.

ROK Contributes Significantly

¶4. (C) Beyond the symbolic and political significance of the ROK's engagement in Afghanistan, its specific mission here is making a valuable, substantive contribution that is much appreciated both by the U.S. military and by local Afghans -- a point that may be worth underscoring to Korean parliamentarians. In addition to their two liaison officers assigned to CJTF-82, the ROK's military personnel at Bagram total 213. This includes 147 personnel of the 100th ROK Engineering Group who undertake major construction projects at Bagram Air Field (BAF). The Group is currently expanding the airfield's ramp space and building hangars and a simulator training facility. The 58 personnel of ROK's 942th Medical Support Group run a level one, non-surgical health care center, where they treat 4,000 Afghans a month. They offer a full range of outpatient care, supported by laboratory, radiology, pharmacy and other departments. The entryway to the facility, which is located on BAF, was recently upgraded following the death of Sgt. Yoon of the ROK Engineering Group in the February 27 SBIED attack at the outer entrance to BAF.

¶5. (C) In addition to these two elements, eight ROK soldiers work as a civil affairs and engineering team, fully integrated into the U.S.-led Bagram Provincial Reconstruction Team operating in Parwan and Kapisa Provinces north of Kabul. That PRT is currently headquartered at BAF but may move off

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the compound in the near future. Because of the nature of their community outreach work, the Korean members of the PRT are frequently off BAF. Although all Korean troops at BAF live and work in a fairly secure environment, as the February SBIED incident demonstrated, no one in theatre is totally safe (Sgt. Yoon was standing at the entrance to BAF's vehicle screening complex, waiting to accompany a local truck onto the installation, when the SBIED was detonated).

FM Spanta to Approach Seoul, Washington

¶6. (C) One problem facing the GOA in trying to convince the Koreans not to pull out is that it does not currently have an Ambassador in Seoul and its Charge there is reportedly not up to the task. Moradian said that, according to the Korean Ambassador in Kabul with whom he met on April 12, the ROKG would like to stay on in Afghanistan but the Parliament is opposed. Afghanistan's Ambassador to the UN plans to raise the issue with his Korean counterpart, and the GOA's Ambassador in Washington plans to approach the NSC and the Department. Foreign Minister Spanta is planning to make a personal appeal to the Koreans by visiting Seoul. Moradian reported that Afghanistan's Ambassador in Washington would be asking the U.S. to make similar approaches to ROK counterparts.

Comment

¶7. (C) According to the MFA, the decision point is with the Korean Parliament, not the ROKG which, it understands, supports retaining the troops in Afghanistan. As Washington engages the Afghans and Koreans on this issue, one suggestion would be to invite a group of Korean Parliamentarians to visit BAF to see first hand the valuable work the Korean troops are doing in Afghanistan. CJTF-82 would support such a visit. Another suggestion to the Koreans would be to consider teaming up with the Lithuanian PRT in Ghor or another PRT in a more secure area of the country. Lithuania is running an excellent PRT and is strengthening security

capabilities. What the Lithuanian PRT lacks are development resources which the Koreans have. The Koreans would have a relatively safe environment and make a huge contribution. Working together, Korea and Lithuania could make a truly winning team.

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